

SHARAKU

708

THE EAST LIBRARY

ART OF THE EAST LIBRARY

SHARAKU



Elise Grilli

Was there ever another artist about whose life so few facts are known?

Was there ever another who is so eloquently revealed through his work? In the year 1794 the artistic firmament of Tokyo sparkled with so many stars that the flash of Sharaku's streaking comet was hardly noticed at all. For about ten months he haunted the Kabuki theatres and the Sumo wrestling ring and produced woodcut designs of that masculine world. The public would have none of these grimacing and gesticulating portraits, when so many other painters could purvey charm, sentiment, grace, local colour, or titivating naughtiness.

One hundred years later European and American critics hailed with their most rapturous eulogies this man of whom there remained only a name and a handful of woodcut prints. Today Sharaku is ranked among the greatest artists of Ukiyo-e and of all time. Museums and private collectors consider no price too high for a Sharaku print in fine condition.

This book sums up the few documentary facts about Sharaku's life; examines the clues from which we may reconstruct his personality; and analyzes the elements that make his art so meaningful for modern times.

Enlarged
Pg. 3.61

CC-O. In Public Domain. Digitized by Sarayu Trust and eGangotri

732.9

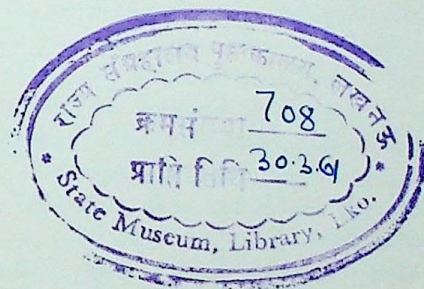
Rs 12.00



UP State Museum, Lucknow

RAM ADVANI
Bookseller
LUCKNOW.

SHARAKU



ELEK BOOKS

GREAT JAMES STREET LONDON

UP State Museum, Lucknow

RAM ADVANI
Bookseller
LUCKNOW.

Rs. 10.50

CC-O. In Public Domain. Digitized by Sarayu Trust and eGangotri

© *English Edition by ZOKEISHA*

Published by
ELEK BOOKS
14 GREAT JAMES STREET
LONDON W. C. 1

Printed in Japan

UP State Museum, Lucknow

SHARAKU

by Elise Grilli

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| I. The Enigma of Sharaku | VI. Conclusion |
| II. Biographical Data | VII. The Plates |
| III. The "Floating World" of Sharaku's Edo | VIII. Glossary |
| IV. Ukiyo-e Prints in the Year 1794 | IX. Bibliography |
| V. Sharaku Reconstructed | |

I. The Enigma of Sharaku

Let us confess at the start that we know almost nothing about the man called Sharaku.

Never was there an artist of whom we know less, short of the ghosts whom we call "Anonymous." But Sharaku is not anonymous. His name appears clearly signed on hundreds of designs that a famous printing establishment in the great city of Edo (the present-day Tokyo) published a century and a half ago. This work emerged not in the chaotic Middle Ages, but in a bustling city of a million inhabitants and in a land that is renowned for its fantastic meticulousness in the keeping of records. The entire era is extremely well documented down to the smallest scraps of laundry bills and casual *billets-doux*. Of Sharaku's fellow-artists there exists a plethora of information about their homes, their teachers, their loves, their journeys, and their peccadillos. Only of Sharaku there remains not a trace beyond that bare name.

Japanese artists have often changed names as readily as garments. Hokusai, for example, was

known to have used over thirty *noms d'artiste* and to have accompanied every change in style and outlook by a new name. Why, then, could not the name of *Sharaku* have been a temporary appellation assumed by a painter or woodcut printer, who sailed under these colors for a year or so and who then invented another name for himself? Why could not *Sharaku* have been a word lightly signed by an artist who later came to be called by quite another name? Why could not *Sharaku* in reality have been called *Shunsho* or *Kiyonaga*, whose works show some stylistic links with the prints of Sharaku? Why not *Utamaro* or *Kunimasa*, who were his contemporaries, and who certainly were influenced by the designs of the mysterious Sharaku?

Such a possibility of shifting this name onto another well-known print artist has been unanimously ruled out by all students of Japanese prints. Even a brief contact with a few of Sharaku's best prints will serve as convincing evidence that this art is absolutely unique and

belongs to a single personality so forceful that we would recognize it under any disguise. Embedded in these prints is a stylistic individuality that sets this work sharply apart from all the other artists who were Sharaku's contemporaries in that flourishing period of *Ukiyo-e*.

How, then, was it possible for an unknown painter to emerge suddenly in a world crowded with artists and connoisseurs — to reach mastery in his very first designs — to work with intense concentration and enormous output for one short year — and to disappear completely without a trace?

This enigma appears even more baffling than that other famous dispute which rages around the name of Shakespeare. However, Elizabethan England lies much farther back in time and has many gaps in historic documentation. And it is conceivable that an actor-playwright might improvise his poetry right on the stage or be careless about signing and recording his manuscripts. Or his work might be pirated, copied and recopied, and its authorship fade away in the hands of hasty actors and scheming printers.

None of these explanations apply in the case of Sharaku. His name stands carved with fastidious precision on hundreds of fine color prints, which were produced in the establishment of a famous printer-publisher in Edo, the same Juzaburo Tsutaya who also issued Utamaro's best prints.

The name is clear. The work is clear. The

work, in fact, speaks with so pellucid a language that one should need no other comment. If one but looks keenly at the designs and listens intently for the voices that emanate from the actors who people this stage, the spirit of the man and his art will take form according to the extent of one's insight; but we are all perversely interested in "something more." We insist on reconstructing as much as possible of the human shape of the artist and of the actual world in which he lived. We eagerly amass the smallest clues and stretch them to the utmost to create some tangible image of the man behind the work.

Let this reconstruction wait for the end of this book and first let us examine the pitifully few scraps of facts that cling to the name of Sharaku.

II. Biographical Data

The facts of the case, the recorded history of Sharaku, can be summed up in one brief paragraph. The most reliable old text dealing with *Ukiyo-e* art, the so-called *Ukiyo-e Ruiko*, states that the artist Sharaku Toshusai (the full name as it appears on some prints) was in reality an actor of the *Noh* drama; that his real name was Saito Jurobei; that he lived at Hachobori in Edo, but that he belonged to the acting troupe of Lord Hachisuka of Awa.

Less reliable rumors add that one Sharaku owned a bookshop at Yoka-ichi, Ise; that he wrote dramas there; and that he died in 1822.

at the age of 48.

In following these traces to their utmost limits, we find further that Lord Hachisuka of Awa, who lived in Tokushima on the island of Shikoku, was indeed a great patron of the *Noh* drama, but among his actors there is no mention of any Sharaku. There is, however, a grave-stone in the Toko Temple at Tokushima bearing the inscription of *Shunto Matazaemon*, who died in Edo in 1844 at the age of 71. Popular legend persists in designating this as the grave of Sharaku. This legend is borne out by an entry in another record called *Sarugaku Denki*, which explains that *Shunto* was a stage name for *Saito*. *Saito Jurobei* was apparently a more tangible person, for in the financial records of Awa and Awaji Province there does occur an entry of payment made to five actors who lived in Edo, and among these actors one *Saito Jurobei* had received two gold pieces.

Legends...rumors...a confusion of names...a link between an actor and a painter of actor portraits. That is all.

A great deal more can be gathered about the actors and the plays that form the main theme of Sharaku's designs, but about the artist himself not a scrap of further information has been found so far.

III. The "Floating World" of Sharaku's Edo

Within the limitations of a short essay it is not possible even to sketch the outlines of the

complex historic era in which Sharaku's art was born. The city of Edo alone exemplifies a phenomenon without parallel in Japanese history, where changes usually occur very slowly, and where no city had ever before mushroomed from a marshy village to a metropolis of a million inhabitants in little more than a hundred years. For a fuller understanding of the interlocking forces and the numerous paradoxes that pervade the social history of Tokugawa Japan and its capital city of Edo, the reader is directed to an admirable book, *Japan: A Short Cultural History*, by Sir George Sansom. In the present scanty paragraphs only that minimum can be attempted which is of the essence to the barest approach to Sharaku.

The stratification of Japanese society had by the end of the eighteenth century hardened to the point of rigidity and persisted in the face of realities that were soon to crack it apart. The feudalistic structure would not keep in step with economic forces which had already dislocated the aristocracy and the soldiery. These were clinging to their high level in a social pyramid of which the emperor in Kyoto formed a mythical apex, while the merchants and the farmers were weighted down at the bottom. This pyramid might yet persist in the country as a whole, but it was most shakily undermined by a new bourgeoisie in the commercial cities of Osaka, Sakai, Nagoya, and, above all, in Edo. This emergence of a prosperous middle class of merchants and artisans parallels a similar development that

took place at the same time in the Western hemisphere, but special conditions in Japan would not permit such salutary, if painful, revolutionary readjustments as Europe experienced in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. The Tokugawa *Shoguns* had constructed a regime that was a veritable strait jacket and that maintained its cramping hold on society until it was suddenly pried open by external forces between 1853 and 1867.

We are here concerned primarily with conditions in the year 1794 to 1795, during those incredibly few months when a strange genius called Sharaku appeared and disappeared in the art world of Edo. In the above-mentioned social stratification we find factors that may explain such a sudden emergence and so rapid a flowering of an unusual talent. We can also see the forces that destroyed Sharaku as swiftly as he had risen.

The pictures called *Ukiyo-e* were the reflection of a reflection—literally *floating pictures* of a *floating world*. The original Buddhist conception implied that the world of external appearances is ephemeral and illusory by comparison with the eternal realities revealed by religion. In Edo this term of *ukiyo* or *floating world* acquired an additional and more precise meaning, for out of the general drift of life there emerged a still more ephemeral class; the amusement purveyors lived without roots in society, without holdings of land, and lacked the respect of a solid citizenry.

The solid citizens of Edo were the wealthy merchants, into whose hands fell a new concentration of power. Money as a medium of exchange was still a new concept, barely understood by the aristocracy and the soldier class, and the shrewd merchants made the most of this financial ignorance. Their moneybags grew constantly heavier at the expense of the aristocrats, who had only their land left to them, and through the exploitation of the warriors, whose livelihood became ever more precarious in an era of continued peace. The *nouveaux-riche* townsmen were still considered *déclassé* by the proud feudal lords and the snobbish *samurai*, but everyone had to defer to the gold in their coffers.

For this gold there was little outlet in ostentatious display such as newly rich people generally crave. Good food was cheap where the farmers were enslaved. Fine clothing was surreptitiously procured in the face of all feudalistic regulations that prescribed who was to wear which colors and which fabrics. Fine houses could hardly be erected on the sly, and crowded Edo left little room for large gardens and estates. Works of art, yes, as far as their limited culture would suggest, and that meant at this time mainly paintings and screens in the style of the Kano and the Korin schools, such as the aristocrats still favored.

The chief outlet for spending was in pleasures and riotous living and it was in the service of this hedonistic life that the *Floating World* had

arisen. Whole sections of the city were given over to warrens of teahouses, restaurants, and places of assignation. The Yoshiwara was the designated "gay quarter" of organized and highly sophisticated prostitution, but the gaiety flowed over into other sections. Amusement parks and boathouses lined the river banks. Sport contests, horse races, cock fighting, and *sumo* wrestling all had their fixed areas and their hordes of devotees. But above all the citizenry of Edo loved the *Kabuki* theatres.

The *Kabuki* stage seemed created by and for the *Edokko*, that brash, cocky, fun-loving and roistering native of Edo, who ruled and supported this newly glittering theatrical pageantry. *Kabuki* may be traced back to earlier starts in Kyoto and Osaka, but it was in Edo that this type of stage production reached its full flowering. On the *Kabuki* stage were displayed all the interests and dreams of a landlocked, lusty population, bursting with fresh energies and conscious of new powers. The epic and heroic tales of old were acted out before an audience of frustrated civilians who were aching to carry a forbidden sword and who could only vicariously strut along with the braggadocio soldiers on the stage. The audience wanted to see these actors nearer and nearer, and so the *hanamichi* runway brought the swashbuckling heroes right through the center of the auditorium. Humorous and amatory plays were not lacking, nor even the *risqué* ones that had impelled the Tokugawa censor to prohibit women actors from

appearing on the stage. No matter. Some male actors developed into specialists of women's roles, called *onnagata*, and so skilled and honored was this type of acting that it persists down to our own day, when nothing but this tradition prevents women from appearing on the *Kabuki* stage.

Together with the improvement in acting skills there developed an endless ingenuity of stage effects, with one of the earliest revolving stages in the world, and with a refined stylization of make-up, music, rhythmic movement, and a pageantry of brilliant costume. The *Kabuki* drama really provided a summation of all the illusions harbored by a confined citizenry. Its popularity was unbounded.

Earlier we had occasion to mention the paintings that decorated the homes of the wealthy citizens. There was a noticeable decline of vigor among the painters of the eighteenth century who emulated the styles of the preceding Kano and Korin schools. To bolster this decline there arose a renewed interest in Chinese styles imported via Nagasaki. The Japanese adaptations of this influence resulted either in piously moralistic pictures of Chinese sages or in the *bunjinga*, the mingling of poetry and painting by scholarly artists. Neither style could be said to suit the Edo bourgeoisie, who looked for an art that reflected bourgeois interests and preoccupations. This art was found first in the paintings of the *genre* school and later in the transfer of the same themes onto the ever-more

colorful and desirable woodcut prints of *Ukiyo-e*.

The wide dispersal of fine prints as a truly democratic popular art raises many questions in the mind of foreign collectors and lovers of the Japanese prints. Could this refined and almost "abstract" type of design really have been understood by an uneducated populace? Were not the refinements of line and color — not to mention the subtle psychological penetration — of a Sharaku print almost wasted on the groundlings who must have wanted little more than a souvenir of their current stage idol?

To be sure, it could not have occurred to the first purchasers of the woodcut prints that they were acquiring masterpieces of the age. Perhaps they saw in Harunobu's designs primarily a pleasing array of sentimental maidens in charmingly decorative kimonos. Quite likely Shunsho, Kiyonaga, or Utamaro were regarded by Japanese connoisseurs as mere purveyors of popular art rather than as classic masters. The prints were cheap and plentiful. Daily new designs and new themes were pouring from the printing establishments that published these works. Anything so cheap and so commonplace could hardly have been regarded as a fine art.

Such evaluation may appear to modern eyes as a crass misjudgment of a great art and a typical misunderstanding of the creative artist. This is completely untrue for Japan — then and now. Even in our times Japan is still producing wonderfully artistic objects that are handed about cheaply and without a trace of adulation.

Pottery, bamboo ware, lacquer, and modern prints are being produced and sold cheaply and simply as embellishments for daily living, but hardly as precious works of art to be placed on museum pedestals, until the enthusiasm of some foreigners calls special attention to the calm high artistry in these objects of daily use. Such acceptance of good art is hardly a result of ignorance or indifference and bespeaks, on the contrary, a deeply ingrained love of beauty which permits an artistic quality to seep down into the most common objects.

When the woodcut prints of the golden age of *Ukiyo-e* were pouring forth from the print shops, they were greeted with delight and certainly not with ignorance. Without the appreciation of numerous buyers there could not have taken place that steady improvement in the art which led up to a truly high finesse. Harunobu and Kiyonaga could hardly complain of unpopularity. If so many fine artists emerged from this popular school (comparable in many respects to modern cartoonists or poster designers), this must surely have happened through a filtering process that eliminated myriads of lesser men in a crowded profession and selected a few of the greatest ones for cultivation and preservation. It was no accident that some of the finest prints of the time were kept alive in mint condition.

On the other hand, we must not credit popular appreciation in Japan with more than an instinctive inclination to fine design, fostered through

many centuries of cultivation in calligraphy, ceramics, flower arrangement, the tea ceremony, and many good handicrafts. This basic understanding of art, spread among all sections of the community, is a highly desirable state of affairs but it must not give us the illusion that every Japanese peasant is ultra-sensitive, or can necessarily distinguish good design. It is more than likely that only some of the artistry of the great print makers was actually appreciated by the majority of their contemporaries. As usual, fine design had wide popularity only when the subject matter was pleasing. When Utamaro painted his *geishas* with color rhythms of wonderful subtlety, this art was not lost on his public, even if they regarded these pictures first of all as *bijin* or pretty-girl pictures, the pin-ups of their day. (Would that our own pin-up pictures held one hundredth of this artistry!) However, when Sharaku did not prettify the matinee idols of the *Kabuki* stage but presented them with a harsh psychological incisiveness, all his fine design could not win him popular favor.

To sum up: the inhabitants of Edo who frequented the *Floating World* and who patronized the print artists, were prosperous, self-satisfied citizens, pleased with their fascinating city and eager to see its life reflected in their arts. They had all the shortcomings of a purse-proud *nouveau-riche* class and many of the vices that might be expected to spring up among hedonistic pleasure-seekers in a circumscribed, ghetto-like

amusement world. To a foreign observer it appears miraculous that such a mushrooming, commercially-minded city of merchants and artisans should have any art sense at all.

The prints prove that the Edo-ites did indubitably have enough aesthetic penetration if they chose such designs for their most intimate art and for the reflection and recording of their culture. Their appreciation was fine enough to select artists who are today regarded as great masters, though they were perhaps not keen enough to detect great style across the barrier of unpleasing subject matter. They should be credited with fostering at least two new art forms, that of the *Kabuki* stage and of the color woodcut prints.

IV. Ukiyo-e Prints in the Year 1794

Beside the enigma of Sharaku's personality there also looms another riddle in the production of the work itself. How was it possible for a newcomer to so technical and precise an art as that of the color woodcut print to start out as a master in his very first design?

Students of Sharaku's art have grouped the 142 print designs into three distinct divisions, according to the time sequence of the production schedule in the *Kabuki* theatre of the season 1794-95, to which the actor portraits correspond, and which affords the only clue to any Sharaku chronology. Within the brief span of this ten months' activity there would hardly seem room for progressive growth. In these three divisions

it appears that the very first period is the best and that the last shows a definite decline—or that the first designs are harmonious and at ease, while the last ones strain for some effect that was not organic to the painter's outlook. How are we to accept this complete reversal of any normal artistic development? How can we understand a summit of ability in the earliest prints of Sharaku? For some key to this conundrum we must re-examine the state of *Ukiyo-e* art at the end of the eighteenth century.

By the year 1794 the art of color woodcut printing had reached its highest perfection of technical refinements and of design finesse. After the vigorous primitives of the first half of the eighteenth century, the genius of Harunobu had fused into the rich coloring of the *nishiki-e* (brocade pictures) a lyrical and poetic grace that lifted his prints from sheer popularity to the level of a fine art. From 1770 onward the color printing technique could hardly evolve much farther. The development during the golden age could go only in the direction of greater expressiveness in design and more diversity in theme.

A long series of truly great masters had appeared to expand this art in both these directions. All the activities and all the pleasures of the inhabitants of Edo found their reflection in the infinite variety of the colorful prints. The generalized personalities and the nameless localities of the early prints grew ever more distinct and localized. The actors of Shunsho

became individual men in specific roles. The teahouses in which the *geishas* and swains of Kiyonaga disported themselves were delineated to their last degree of local color. The streets and the bridges could be recognized and the shops were identified by their curtains and their signboards. The Edo-ites had an insatiable appetite for every aspect and every personality of their beloved city. And still the publishers looked about for new talent among the painters.

This may be the right place to clarify the relation that existed between the artists who supplied the designs and the professional craftsmen who produced the prints.

Contrary to modern practice, a woodcut print of *Ukiyo-e* was the product of many hands. When we speak of a print by Sharaku or Hokusai, we do not thereby designate a sheet of paper which was actually printed and colored by the artist whose name appears at the side of the design. Under the artist's signature there often is found a seal of the printing house that published the design. Our present-day passion for individuality and creativity must not blind us to the importance of that second name.

Printing from carved wooden boards had long been established as a highly professional skill that could cope with letters or pictures, with black ink or with colors. The rapid tempo of the development of polychrome printing from Masanobu to Harunobu can be explained only when we recognize the importance of the very clever craftsmen who stood at the side of the

painters, ready to transfer their sketches onto the wooden blocks, to carve a separate block for every distinct color, and then to align these superimposed printings with fantastic precision in order to achieve a complex design in any desired color range. In Japan this teamwork of painter and printers attained a perfection hardly conceived of in the Western hemisphere.

The key personality in the production of a *Ukiyo-e* print, and second only to the creator of the design, was the publisher who had to be artistic enough to collaborate with the painter, craftsmanlike in his supervision of the carvers and colorists, and businesslike in sensing the needs of the market and in the efficient distribution of the prints to a wide public. These diverse abilities were not often encountered in a single person. When such a man appeared, the whole art experienced a stimulating lift. And such a man was Juzaburo Tsutaya, a prince among printers and a great friend of the best artists whom he could lure into a collaboration in print publication.

In 1794 Tsutaya was an old hand at the game (he was to die in 1797) and he had already worked with such men as Utamaro. Yet he was always alert for new talent and sharp-eyed enough to detect a fresh vision even when the painter was young or inexperienced. Such a man might readily detect a spark of talent in the least likely quarter. When he caught a glimpse of some strange portrait sketches dashed off by the brush of an unknown and non-

professional draftsman he must have seized them eagerly. What if this newcomer was actually an actor of the *Noh* drama and knew nothing about woodcuts? He, Tsutaya, and the printers in his shop surely knew enough about the technical side of the job. Just let that actor go on sketching his impressions of the *Kabuki* stage and the *Sumo* wrestlers—just let him jot down his extraordinary reactions, so different from any that Tsutaya had seen before—then the painter need not trouble himself about the printing and leave all that to the experts.

Thus there came about this strange and fruitful partnership for the mutual enrichment of both men. It was to last only a brief time, but long enough to bequeath to the world a most precious handful of the finest woodcut prints of all time.

In this manner it became possible for a newcomer and a nobody to step at once to the apex of an art. Such collaboration and specialization explain the perfection of Sharaku's earliest prints and admit of no further development. Actually the procedure of this joint effort was not as clear-cut and simple as all that, and calls for some additional explanation.

The designs which Sharaku or any other painter brought to his publisher were simple line drawings, made with a brush and ink on white paper. In addition there were color notations, verbal or pictorial, but the important keynote lay in that black-and-white drawing. This paper was then pasted face down onto a

cherry-wood board and the carver could begin his work.

First the reverse side of the paper had to be carefully scraped to make it thinner until the black ink lines of the design showed through in every detail. Thereupon the carver set to with his sharp tools and cut and whittled away on each side of every line until the ridge stood forth with sharp delineation. When all the lines were thus revealed, the block was inked and the first impression was pulled from it. The original design from the master's hand was thus unfortunately destroyed, but no one seemed to grieve over so slight a detail. The important thing, after all, would be the print and not the original drawing.

In a fine print shop the artist was constantly on hand to follow his design along through every step of the printing process. He was given several of the black line prints for his color experimentation. He was consulted about the printer's matching of the desired color harmonies and his approval was requested for the execution of minute details. He was shown several *épreuves d'artiste* and he was allowed to make changes and to develop variations. A dozen or more proofs might be drawn before the artist was fully satisfied and the printer could go ahead with his work. And even then both the artist and the publisher kept watch over the entire edition, lest the colorists grow careless or the precision of the register marks begin to slip and to blur. With such care hundreds of

fine prints could be pulled from the blocks before these began to decay and had to be replaced by newly carved blocks. This procedure prevailed in Tsutaya's establishment and was also found in other print shops of the good period in *Ukiyo-e* art.

This division of labor without mechanical monotony yielded great prints and allowed full freedom for the painter. A man like Sharaku, without any apprenticeship in the craft, could join his special talents to a fully elaborated craft and tradition. He need not labor over the tedious details of reproduction and could concentrate his vision and all emotional impact on the area of his greatest interest. He was supported by a long tradition and the whole art could rise to new heights under his personal impetus.

Here, again, there comes to mind an analogy between Shakespeare and Sharaku, as regards their standing within the evolution of their respective arts. Neither man was an innovator. Each was preceded by a line of distinguished artists who had gradually lifted a hoary tradition onto a new plateau where blew wild winds of invigorating power. The leap which Elizabethan drama took between the years 1550 and 1600 was just as unprecedented and as wildly daring as was the expansion of woodcut printing in the half century preceding Sharaku. Closely preceding the activity of the culminating artist was a circle of vigorous experimenters who hewed the steps, as it were,

into the mountainside as a foothold for the next genius, who himself was not as adventurous. His contribution was to be a deeper insight into the human soul, a power for comprehensive summation of all that had gone before, and a new resolution on the highest attainable peak. Marlowe, one step away from Shakespeare, would thus correspond to Utamaro at the side of Sharaku.

In each case the art had reached a fullness of technique and craftsmanship and seemed to be waiting for a final consummation. A stage, a style, a group of capable actors, and a passionately interested audience surrounded Shakespeare. A similar nucleus of skilled craftsmen and an equally receptive public awaited Sharaku.

But here the resemblance comes to a sudden end. Shakespeare was at ease in the world of his art. He expanded his creative powers during a stretch of more than twenty years crowded with achievement and with commensurate reward. He enjoyed financial success coupled with recognition by royalty, the admiration of his peers, and a wide popular favor. Sharaku had no time for unfolding, no apparent reward, and no contemporary acclaim. He lacked the popular touch. His work was too harsh and too uncompromising to win a wide following either among the actors, who resented the unflattering truth, or among the theatre-goers, who wanted their idols prettified and sentimentally enchanting.

V. Sharaku Reconstructed

An artist reveals himself best through his work, far better than through the objective facts that the law designates as evidence. In their outward lives men may disguise their personality, intentionally or not, and can sometimes deceive themselves as well as others. Dates can be altered, misinterpreted, or entirely lost. Historical entries may err and the historians who bank exclusively on given *facts* may err even more widely. Addresses, records, names, letters, souvenirs, signatures, seals, tombstones, memories of friends and family—all these external traces of a man may yet form pitfalls of error for the avid biographer. Such factual clues have great value when they are numerous and can be checked one against the other; also they are the only clues for a historical re-assembling of *homo politicus*, of the life of a man among other men, of a life that was spent largely in social interaction without leaving any residue of personal expression through any of the arts.

But where there remains a sizable body of writings or paintings or artistic construction of some form, then surely this material should be considered as evidence accurate beyond any other kind. No disguises or misinterpretations are possible in the work itself. A work of art is created on so many levels of the whole personality that no man is clever enough to fake or alter it. The work of art is an aggregate of

atoms drawn from myriads of submicroscopic channels in a man's psyche and physique. No matter how consciously and logically the artist may try to construct his work, its deepest links are implanted with such complexity and profundity in his blood and his soul that he only deludes himself if he believes that he is fully in command of the design. He may consciously try to use a technique or follow a style that is current in his day; he may be influenced by ideas and manners that prevail around him; he may even aim at a specific market or function, but all this planning and directing can at most affect the surface of his form. It can help the critical observer to place the work in its correct time and milieu; yet the core of the art involves the whole being of the artist, with his entire psycho-physical heritage, far deeper and more genuine than the curlicues on the surface.

The complexity of the process of penetration into the submerged depths of an artist is truly overwhelming and it can readily be seen why the casual observer prefers to deal with biographic anecdotes and historic tidbits. The more documentation and information surround an artist and his work, the more fascinating and entertaining his environment, the less likely is the public to concentrate on the art itself. Such a fate has encumbered the real understanding of Michelangelo and Rembrandt, of Beethoven and Van Gogh, all of whom are surrounded with clouds of romanticism that halt the progress of easygoing art-lovers and allow a

passageway only for the most intrepid searchers.

In the case of Sharaku—unfortunately or luckily—the biographic fragments are so few that they cannot obscure the art. There is nothing to speak for the man and to introduce him to the admirer of *Ukiyo-e*, nothing but his art. The strength and the refinement of his design appeal so directly to the aesthetics and the taste of our own day, that Sharaku has found a worshipping public at last.

Why then attempt anything further? If the work has its own immediate, forceful interest, why do we persist in groping backward through the obscurity that veils the artist?

In the biographical section at the beginning of this book it was admitted that we know almost nothing about the man, that the work stands forth sharp and clear, and that we yet seek perversely for *something more*. Perhaps it is not a perversity, this drive for a humanistic understanding in addition to the purely aesthetic one. Perhaps we realize, despite our present-day adulation of abstract art, that abstract design per se is only a fragment of the work of art. Perhaps we are ready to use psychological and sociological inquiries, not for sentimental preoccupations with the artistic *Bohème*, but for the enlargement of our understanding of the art itself.

Modern criticism has provided tools for design analysis. Via the anatomical dissection of a composition we can arrive at a rational explanation for the intuitive pleasure that

attracted us to the design in the first place. We can take apart the elements of line, color, mass, and texture, and we can reconstruct the plan whereby these elements were assembled through rhythm, emphasis, variation, and other devices into a harmonious and meaningful whole. Then, at the end of this analytic process, we still remain inarticulate before an element we can only designate as *poetry*.

The poetry in the designs of Sharaku involves far more than the pictorial elements of a painting. Finesse of composition, which we are ready to admire in a minor artist, is only a beginning, a basic assumption and a *sine qua non* in the work of any great master. In fact, many of the design refinements in the prints of Sharaku may not even be his own at all and may have to be credited to the great skill of the woodblock carvers and printers of *Ukiyo-e*. We know how much these fine craftsmen added to the designs of Utamaro and Hiroshige, whose paintings are usually vastly inferior to their woodcut prints. The same strengthening through sensitive printing methods may also have benefited Sharaku. That is all the more reason why we are compelled to seek out the essence of his poetry, the intangible quality that makes his art personal, separate, and looming in stature above the generally high level of a very refined art period.

The following reconstruction of Sharaku is attempted in all humility as a possible way to an understanding of the creative process rooted

in an old tradition, encumbered by materialistic concerns, aided by skillful craftsmanship, hampered by social obstacles, forcing its way upward through the *élan vital* of genius, to branch out finally in a crowning achievement that is dramatic, aesthetic, pictorial, and humanistic — and greater than any one of these strains.

Our reconstruction must start out from the work that Sharaku has left behind, from the 142 woodcut designs and 17 drawings that constitute his entire output.

This work has an extreme limitation of subject matter. It pictures an exclusively masculine world of male actors and popular Sumo wrestlers, and it concentrates on these themes for no externally imposed reasons of inadequate printing techniques or of a narrow public interest. In the year 1794 the art of the woodcut print stood at the peak of its technical refinement and was looking about for new themes. The world of the amusement centers, of *geishas* and courtesans, of boating parties and teahouses, of theatrical scenes and of crowded streets, all this had been most thoroughly explored by a long line of print artists. Harunobu and Kiyonaga had begun to use landscape elements as a background for their figures. This was to be the next development in woodcuts, for the theme of nature, of landscape and flowers and birds, was never far from the thoughts of the nature-loving Oriental artists. Yet Sharaku would have none of the charm and scintillating variety of these subjects. Nothing beyond the world of male

actors and wrestlers seemed to flow into his brush.

Modern psychological inquiry would incline at once to an assumption of homosexuality. This may be true or not, but in either case it would not carry the same importance for an artist in eighteenth-century Edo that it assumes in the more prurient atmosphere of twentieth-century Europe or America. The laxity of sexual *mores* stood in remarkable contrast to all the other social controls imposed by the Tokugawa regime and if compulsive drives are largely the results of offensive prohibitions, then there would seem to be no reason for any difficulties to develop on that score. Surely there could be no greater tolerance of sexual behavior than that which existed in the *Floating World* of Sharaku's Edo.

The concentration on masculine themes in Sharaku may not have any wider implication than that this artist knew the world of actors extremely well and that he was urged by his publishers to exploit this popular subject. After all, Sharaku was active for only a year or so and many an artist is preoccupied with a single theme for as long a time. The prints dealing with *Sumo* wrestlers are greatly inferior to Sharaku's actor portraits and he may have been urged to produce the sporting prints merely as a popular bestseller of that day.

But for the designs of the actor portraits no such superficial explanation will suffice. This theme was really in Sharaku's blood. No ex-

ternal suggestions could have evoked this art and surely none were needed. The stimulus very likely flowed the other way. When certain drawings of actor portraits were brought to the attention of the publisher Tsutaya, either by some intermediating friend or by Sharaku himself, the printer must have sensed at once that he had stumbled on a new and incisive approach to a subject that had already been made popular by Shunsho and others and that might appeal to a vast public waiting avidly for new pictures of their great theatrical idols.

Tsutaya, who stood firmly in this field and who had vast experience with artists of *Ukiyo-e*, must have felt, as we do, that in Sharaku's designs there lay an intimacy with the *Kabuki* stage and a sharpness of direct observation that made the earlier prints by Shunsho appear remote and cool. Indeed, Shunsho himself would not admit an intimate involvement with the disreputable theatrical crowd. In a preface to his book of actor portraits Shunsho disclaims too close a friendship when he states as follows: "I love the theatre and I enjoy being a spectator, but I have no connection with the actors themselves, and do not know them in private life."

Whether Sharaku knew these actors in private life is not known and seems rather unlikely. If he really was a *Noh* actor, then he would not have much love for *Kabuki* actors or they for him. But that he knew most intimately the roles which these actors were performing, of that fact the existing prints leave no doubt.

Personal friendship with the actors would surely have softened his frequently harsh and satirical criticism implied in many a design. No, he did not manifest any backstage intimacy and he had no links that might prevent him from revealing the feet of clay of the great idols of the *Kabuki* stage. Sharaku was the most penetrating critic of acting that *Kabuki* has ever known and his insight into each impersonation was formed from the same line of vision as that of the audience, from the pit looking up, as is evidenced clearly in Plate 29 and in many of his *mie* poses. Like many another *aficionado* of *Kabuki* he must have battled his way to a seat close to the *hanamichi*, that long platform running directly through the auditorium where the actor and the public reached their closest interaction.

From the pictures alone it is evident that the painter was intensely interested in *Kabuki*; that he veritably lived in the theatre; that he saw the performances over and over again, so as to be able to paint different roles in one play and often different aspects of a single actor; and that he was more than an outsider reporting dutifully on the theatrical scene of the day. He was objective in his criticism of acting, but deeply subjective in his empathy and penetration into the part which the actor was trying to project.

To say that he understood the character of the actor behind his make-up and that he may have known the man better than the man

himself would not be an exaggeration and might apply to some other sharp portraitists. How many of the sitters of Rembrandt or Goya were likely to have had as deep an insight into their own personalities as that which was perceived by the piercing eyes of the painter? Sharaku gives us not only the separate personality of each actor; in his double portraits he often achieves a revelation of the interrelationship of the characters on the stage to a degree hardly vouchsafed to the actors who hurriedly learned a part and rushed through a great repertoire of performances without long preparation or detailed rehearsing. The care of production and performance of *Kabuki* drama in Sharaku's day could hardly have been much higher than that of the modern operatic stage, where a similar virtuosity prevails in individual performances and seldom a real integration in a carefully planned whole.

Hence we wonder whether the masterly interplay and interactions such as are found in Plate 27, for example, did actually reside in the actors on the stage or whether this psychological translation into pictorial terms may not have been born in the painter's own reaction to a dramatic situation.

This brings us to the first point of speculation in our "reconstruction," for up to now there could be no challenge about the painter's close interest in the *Kabuki* theatre. Now we reach the jumping off point into the unknown, when we begin to ask how such insight, such critical

acumen, such sympathy and empathy became possible for a fly-by-night painter who appeared and disappeared in the art of *Ukiyo-e*, all in the space of one short year?

Here we may gingerly pick up the suggestion that Sharaku was a *Noh* actor. The documentation in support of this idea is not entirely convincing; however, it becomes far more credible when this suggestion is re-examined in the light of the prints themselves and the resulting dramatic understanding discussed above. The concept of Sharaku as a *Noh* actor presents a key to open many puzzling doors.

From an entirely different side we have already reached the conclusion that the power of projection into a role and its performance, which the designer manifested in several of his prints, could not have been achieved by an ordinary painter of the *Ukiyo-e* school. Sharaku's actor portraits of individual heads might have been drawn in special sittings such as we associate with ordinary portraiture, but this procedure cannot account for the designs of the double portraits. Here the painter caught a scene on the stage from *out front*. He recorded not only the costuming and the set, cliché pose of a group of actors, but he went far beyond into an understanding and empathy of the actor in each part and their interaction in the drama. Only a real man of the theatre could be capable of such a grasp of its essence in the brief moment allowed during an actual performance. Or, to put it differently, Sharaku

must have been vastly more intimate with the personages and the action on this stage than might be said of a comparable familiarity which a Kiyonaga or an Utamaro might achieve with far more leisure in the settings of the pleasure houses of the Yoshiwara. And yet these latter artists composed their designs with doll-like repetitions of standard figures, while Sharaku was always extremely topical and personally involved with each character.

Only an actor or a playwright may be assumed to possess this direct insight into the creation of characters. A playwright may have the literary understanding, but hardly the pictorial vision. An actor—and especially one who is not himself physically involved in a production—is the most likely agent for such critical projection into a role as it is enacted on the stage. What actor sitting passively in the audience is not ready to elucidate how differently, and how much better, he would have interpreted this same role!

This brings us back to Sharaku as an actor. He could hardly have been a *Kabuki* actor, else he would himself enact these roles and would lack the critical objectivity in regard to his fellow actors. No, he must have been inside and outside at the same time—an actor and yet not an integral part of the *Kabuki* world. Hence we are inclined to accept the information that he was an actor of the *Noh* drama and moved in an entirely different theatrical milieu.

The suggestion that Sharaku was a *Noh*

actor is, in fact, so marvelously apt that we might have had to invent the idea if history had not furnished it to us. Here lies an explanation not only for Sharaku's ability to understand acting, but even more pertinently for his love-and-hate, for his passionate interest in the play and his unblinking demonstration of the weaknesses and foibles of the actors whenever they do not measure up to their roles. Only an actor trained in the elegant and esoteric school of *Noh* might confront *Kabuki* with such contradictory emotions as Sharaku manifests in his prints.

For the sake of readers in lands far remote from Japan's theatrical conventions it may be necessary here to clarify the difference between the dramas of *Noh* and *Kabuki* and the extent to which this difference might shock and excite an actor who would step from one of these worlds to the other.

The *Noh* drama, even in Sharaku's day, was an old established art, reaching back for its origin to the hoary beginnings of Japanese poetry and religious ritual. Its final form was fixed in the fifteenth century and its literature and theatrical conventions have not changed since that time. The *Noh* drama was never a popular art. Its literary content was too lofty in poetry and symbolism and its chanting recitative made the meaning quite incomprehensible to the untrained ear. The use of masks and heavy costume dehumanised the actor and made him a carrier for abstract ideas,

half religious and half poetical in meaning. The motions of the actors in walking or dancing were to be performed with a stylization of gesture and a slow tempo that removed any resemblance to ordinary human behavior. In comparison, the Greek drama would have seemed far more humanly impassioned; a religious procession or mass in church would appear more dramatically direct. The *Noh* drama always exacted from its audience a learning in literature and a familiarity with its intricate symbolism. On its interpreters it imposed the most dedicated lifelong sacrifice to a discipline and a training that cut the actor off from most ordinary human pursuits. For its performances the *Noh* drama demanded a special stage in a specially constructed theatre, a blending of indoors and outdoors in a location remote from the turmoil of daily life. All these terms could be met only on the estates of the aristocracy, of emperors, *shoguns*, or *daimyos* who acted as patrons of an art that reflected nobility and finesse on its practitioners and its audience.

An actor of the *Noh* drama was likely to be a descendant of actors or an especially gifted child who had been adopted into such an acting family. His livelihood was assured, even if it was no more munificent than that of a monk. He spent his entire life in the study and perfecting of his spoken parts, of his dance movements, and of his manipulation of the mask that covered his face. He received no applause and felt no interaction with the audience who

sat in silence and awe throughout the performance. He lived on a remote estate, sheltered from city noises, and often unaware of their existence. (The recent emergence of *Noh* theatres in large cities is a modern phenomenon in Japan.)

If Sharaku was a member of the *Noh* troupe of Lord Hachisuka, he grew up as a feudal dependent on his lord's holdings at Awa, on the island of Shikoku, in a picturesque and world-remote setting that itself spelled poetry. The transplanting of such an actor to the city of Edo would result from the regulations of the feudalistic Tokugawa regime which demanded that its vassals spend part of every year in attendance on the *Shogun* in Edo. And so a young *Noh* actor might suddenly find himself transported from a rustic idyll to a metropolis of a million inhabitants, to a clamorous, commercial conglomeration of crowded streets, through which was milling a pleasure-loving rowdy humanity of merchants and artisans, the lowest *hoi polloi* in the rigid social scale of Japan.

A more shocking event than this contrast in living conditions must have been the *Noh* actor's first experience of the *Kabuki* theatre. Here was a popular theatre that was really of the people, for the people. Only a hundred years or so previously, at the end of the seventeenth century, had this type of performance managed to separate itself from the circus mountebanks of amusement areas along the

rivers and from the puppet theatres that were its most instructive models. Time and time again edicts had to be issued by the government to extirpate from the popular stage its disreputable appendages of prostitutes and perverts. This *Kabuki* theatre was a lusty gangling newcomer in the amusement world and manifested a boundless energy in absorbing traditions and conventions from other theatrical arts, taking the music from *yoruri* singers, the instruments of *samisen* performers, plots and legends from the venerable *Noh* drama, dance movements from folk and temple dances, narrative recitation from roaming storytellers, and whole dramas and acting conventions from the *Bunraku* puppet theatre. These ingredients were freely compounded and rearranged. New inventions of staging ingenuity added the revolving stage and turned the *hanamichi* runway to bisect the auditorium. The fervent support of an enthusiastic public brought prosperity to this theatre and allowed a pageantry of costume and setting to enhance its visual appeal. As the dramaturgy and the staging improved, the actors also shed their picaresque irresponsibility and began to raise their profession to the level of an art.

Kabuki became, above all, an art of the actors. Here for the first time in Japan was a form of theatrical entertainment that did not dwarf humanity under ethical nobility and religious symbolism, that acknowledged human passions, and yet maintained an artistic style

and discipline. It gave full scope to the actors for interpretations of forceful characters expressed through all the theatrical devices of motion, sound, picturesque costume, and roaring poetical recitation. All the way through it was the actors who dominated and fused all the theatrical elements. Always the actors were in the foreground, entering and leaving the stage with dramatic fanfares after they had stopped for their greatest moment of glory at a peak of theatrical pose and gesture called the *mie*.

Particularly exciting to a *Noh* actor must be the potentiality of the human face as a means of direct theatrical expression. To one accustomed to hide always behind a wonderfully suggestive *Noh* mask, the direct exposure of the actor's face must constitute a traumatic experience. After the first shock, after a feeling of nudity, the sensation of freedom must have seemed intoxicating to Sharaku. The facial make-up of *Kabuki* drama, which may appear mask-like to a person accustomed to the realistic theatre, is actually calculated to heighten and emphasize the actor's own physiognomy. Sharaku noted every lift of the eyebrows, every red accent on the whitened faces, and every twist of the lips. To him the stylized make-up did by no means obliterate the individual visage, for he recalled every detail of personal idiosyncrasy in the conformation and expression of the faces. One gradually comes to know and recognize each actor and in time these portraits assume a realism above the usual mirroring of nature

implied in this term. There is more than one reality embodied in these portraits: there is the personality of the actor himself; then the impersonation he takes on in the role; and sometimes a final revelation of the dramatic character as the playwright and Sharaku would have him—and as the human actor perhaps seldom could attain.

It is thus quite likely that Sharaku was swinging in a constant alternation between eagerness and disgust, between the thrilling potentialities that suddenly appeared in acting and the clumsy actualities that he witnessed in many an actor. The strutting and the rushing must have offended his sense of rhythm and the loud rantings must have pierced his ears. Shakespeare, similarly, often expressed his dislike of the groundlings who loved blood-and-thunder and egged the actors on to exaggerated gestures. Like Hamlet, Sharaku would have liked to issue his injunctions to the players "not to mouth the lines" and "not to saw the air with the hand, thus," but unlike the prince he could not voice his revulsion and could only paint it on a sheet of paper. As he sat in that febrile, shouting audience, Sharaku must have been swept up into the excitement of the drama, into an intensity of participation and a pounding of the bloodstream such as he had never dreamed was possible in the elegiac *Noh* drama.

Thus the actor trained in the art of greatest restraint was suddenly thrust into the theatricalities of pageantry, of sentimentality, of *ara-*

goto (literally *rough-business*) melodramatics and of rampantly exaggerated emotionality. He was fascinated and repelled in turns. He found this art crude in comparison with the elegance and over-refinement of *Noh*, but wonderfully stimulating with a primitive vigor of blood-and-thunder emotionalities. He admired the bravado of the actors and then shuddered at their brutality and crude externalization. He started by hating this ill-bred distortion of century-old refinements in theatrical arts, and then ended by envying the absence of restraint and the infinite potentialities of a vigorous new form.

Sharaku must have experienced all the agonies of a sinner and apostate defecting from a great religion and all the exaltation of the convert to a new faith. He was not admitted into *Kabuki* as a participant, for such shifts in status and allegiance were simply inconceivable in a feudalistic society. He remained technically within the fold of his designated profession and, if we may believe the tombstone on the island of Shikoku, he returned to end his days in the countryside where he was born.

Only for one single year did he live and breathe in the intoxicating air of freedom. During that year he could not have done anything but see *Kabuki* almost daily and seek a direct design equivalent for his reaction to every actor and every drama. What that reaction was now speaks to us exclusively through the violent oppositions of pattern, the rushing linear

rhythms, the alternation of somber color with lightning streaks or red and with thunder of deepest black. During that one year *Kabuki* found its most truthful recorder, its harshest critic, and, ultimately, its most penetrating and sympathetic follower.

And after that year? Did those wonderful designs really find no understanding public and did Tsutaya regretfully stop printing them? Did the Lord of Awa recall the recalcitrant actor to his home territories? We do not know. The rest is silence....

VI. Conclusion

The foregoing reconstruction presumes to be no more than an image created as an aid to understanding. It is merely a hypothesis created from data derived from historical, theatrical, and design lore. If new data about Sharaku should be unearthed tomorrow, this image will have to be revised. In the meantime it will serve at least as an indication of the quantity and profundity of the clues that exist within the complex of pictorial and psychological elements in Sharaku's work. Let others go over and over this work, again and again, and assemble their own set of clues. Even if no final solution is attained, this search will bring its own immediate reward in the enthralling contact with an unusually sharp-eyed and vitally expressive personality.

Very deliberately this analysis has been laying stress on content over form, or on the theatre

element in subject matter rather than on the sheer design conformation of Sharaku's prints. This apparent departure from modern critical preoccupation with pure composition was pursued for several reasons.

First of all, the separation and examination of compositional devices and technical refinements can be performed anywhere, in any museum, gallery, or private collection far from the shores of Japan. Very likely it is this visual beauty of area division, linear rhythms and color harmonies that emerges most forcefully and forms the first lure which attracts to Sharaku his many foreign admirers. However, this refinement of Japanese pictorial design is not unique in Sharaku; it is not more remarkable in him than in a dozen other *Ukiyo-e* artists; and it should be credited to a very large extent to the craftsmen and printers who stood at his side. It constitutes a distortion to lift this design quality out of its context in a long historic tradition. Such distortion has, in fact, been committed in all good-will and in all innocence by the first European admirers of the Japanese prints. Space distribution and linear composition of *Ukiyo-e* art go back many hundreds of years, at least as far back as the famous illustrated scroll of the *Tale of Genji*. The technical perfection of color printing in woodcuts also had been accomplished about thirty years before Sharaku flashed across the scene of Edo.

Secondly, the special linkage between the-

atrical and pictorial arts in Sharaku's actor portraits cannot be estimated by anyone who has had no contact with the Japanese theatre. It is therefore incumbent on a critic who has this experience to point out the overwhelming importance which the *Kabuki* stage exerted as a formative stimulus in the creation of these prints. But *Kabuki* alone does not reveal the whole story, for there was a wide vogue for actor prints before and after Sharaku. This fashion involved several outstanding artists of the day, without eliciting from any of these more than a fine, objective description. Only in Sharaku did this theme of a popular theatre give rise to a subjective projection and self-identification, to evident psychological conflicts of admiration and harsh revelation. Aside from any outside rumors or any speculations about Sharaku as a *Noh* actor, the prints themselves reveal a concentration of theme, a concentration of vision in "close-up," and a concentration of dramatic insight, all of which were instantly translated into powerful visual equivalents.

It is only as a third step that we resorted to the acceptance of the report that Sharaku was an actor of the *Noh* drama who was temporarily enmeshed with the rival art of the *Kabuki* stage. In the emotional conflict of an actor trained in poetic symbolism and restraint, then suddenly thrust forth into a glittering world of pageantry and extrovert acting techniques, in this opposition we found a psychological explanation for

much that is otherwise obscure in Sharaku's art.

A final word should be added about the shifts in appreciation that this art has undergone in the course of little more than one hundred years. In his own day Sharaku was evidently regarded as interesting by a few collectors who salvaged and cherished his work, but as too harsh for the masses who desired attractive and idealized mementoes of their theatrical idols. The idea of caricature has been read into these designs by European critics unfamiliar with *Kabuki* facial make-up. The actors and the public of Sharaku's time most likely considered these portraits to be ruthlessly realistic, but hardly sardonic in their exaggeration. There is no exaggeration, only a selective emphasis, in these faces. The publisher Tsutaya may have tried in vain to achieve a wider distribution for designs which he, personally, found interesting enough to promote. We may assess Sharaku as an artistic success but a popular failure, yet perhaps no more drastically so than was the fate of many another artist. His cessation of painting, as sudden and unaccountable as his start, may have had various other contributing reasons. One need seek no farther than a possible recall to his acting duties by the feudal lord to whom his entire life was attached.

The European admirers who brought Sharaku's work back to life deserve plaudits for their aesthetic insight and their critical independence, but in the incandescence of their discovery and in the heat of their passion they were carried away into paeans and rhapsodies that

justifiably puzzled the Japanese. Some of the sentences in the writings of De Goncourt, Kurth, Ficke and others of that generation reveal the flight of their imagination as much as the warmth of their admiration. They also provide an antidote for the appalling lapse of comprehension evidenced by Fenollosa and others who saw only vulgar caricaturing in these designs that departed so radically from nineteenth century academic precepts, whether European or Japanese.

Today Sharaku is held in a more balanced evaluation, both in his homeland and abroad. Most Japanese students now class him as one of the "six greatest masters" of the *Ukiyo-e* print. In other lands the estimate may run even higher. Since Sharaku had so brief a period of activity and his output was so very restricted, an added scarcity value has tended to raise the market price of his prints to a level entirely incomprehensible to a *Noh* actor at a humble rung of the feudalistic scale. Time has vindicated old neglects and misunderstandings; it may also correct over-estimations and let Sharaku stand unembellished as part of a great tradition in an art-impregnated country.

Ⅶ The Plates

Plate 1. *Segawa Kikunojo III*, in the role of *Oshizu*, wife of *Tanabe Bunzo*, in the drama *Hana Ayame Bunroku Soga*, performed at the *Miyako Theatre*, May 1794 (*Kansei 6*)

Segawa Kikunojo (whose family name was *Hamura*) was one of the famous *onnagata* or actors specializing in female roles. *Sharaku* depicted him several times (cf. Plates 15, 16), but this appears to be the earliest of his portraits. The brilliance of color, which here contrasts with the black mica background, gives way to more muted color schemes in his later works.

Plate 2. *Ichikawa Ebizo* as *Takemura Sada-noshin* in *Koi-nyo-bo Somewake Tazuna*, performed at the *Kawarazaki Theatre*, May 1794.

This actor was later called *Ichikawa Danjuro V* and became "King of the *Kansei Theatre*," evidently one of the most forceful actor-personalities of the day. *Sharaku* here uses only three colors against the black mica ground. The attention is centered on the stark white face, the staring eyes, and the twisted mouth, "ugly as a monkey," but with the very incarnation of a driving will-power. The painter took full advantage of the angularities in costume, in the crest designs, and in the overlapping collars, to echo throughout the design the bristling sharpness of a personality.

Plate 3. *Otani Oniji II* as *Yakko-Edobei* in the same production as Plate 2.

In this design *Sharaku* aims at a revelation of

sheer villainy and uses all devices of color, line, and gesture to emphasize this characterization. It has been pointed out by some critics that the hands are too small and poorly drawn; this may be true enough from a realistic point of view, but they function perfectly as expressive accessories in the aggressiveness of pose. The thrust of the head diagonally across the page and the linear opposition of the stripes in the costume, not to mention the make-up and expression of the face, all contribute to the tension and threat of this abstraction of evil.

The *mon* or family crest on the shoulder of his costume, reads "Oni" and is the actor's personal insignia, as was customary in the *Kabuki* theatre of that day. The various actors can be identified by these crests that appear and reappear throughout the *Sharaku* prints.

Plate 4. *Ichikawa Omezo* as *Yakko-Ichibei*, in the same production as Plates 2 and 3.

This picture may be considered as a companion-piece to Plate 3, in the sense that this character is to personify the forces of good in opposition to evil. (See also same actors on Pl. 28) Despite his show of manly courage in drawing his sword, the young man here is all roundness and softness in contrast to the spiky angularity and threat of the villain. The actor here shown was only 16 years old at this time; later on he became one of the great figures of the *Kabuki* stage.

Plate 5. *Iwai Hanshiro IV* as the Nurse *Shigenoi*, in the same production as Plates 2, 3, and 4.

The role of this nurse provided a fine character

study for the *onnagata* or female impersonators of the *Kabuki* theatre. She is the heroine of this play, which deals with the tragedy of separation from a child.

Despite the stylization of make-up Sharaku nevertheless captured some of the quality of warmth and generosity in the roundness of the face, the curve of the hand, and the rhythmic flow of line in the costume. Then he indicated the firmness of will in the sudden twist of the head and in the jutting of the comb and pin in the coiffure.

In this design Sharaku achieves a complete blend of design and content, or of characterization through sheerly pictorial elements.

Plate 6. *Sawamura Yodogoro II* (at right) as *Kawazura Hogen* and *Bando Zenji* (at left) as *Oni-sado-bo* in *Yoshitsune Sembon-Zakura*, produced at the *Kawarazaki Theatre* in May 1794.

Sharaku left a number of double portraits, of two actors from the same play placed into a single composition. This sort of grouping was merely a fashion, but for Sharaku it offered an opportunity for contrasts of character pictorially rendered through contrasts of design devices.

In the present print the painter concentrates on the relationship between the characters, on the intrigue which almost visibly flows from the Iago-like schemer to the gullible, good-natured old man. To be sure, the *Kabuki* make-up already aimed at this characterization, but Sharaku heightens it at every point by a lift or a twist of line. The eyebrows and the glance of the eyes carry in essence this opposition of human types.

Plate 7. *Nakajima Wadaemon* (at right) as *Chozaemon* and *Nakamura Konzo* (at left) as *Gon*, the worker in the boathouse *Kana-*

gawaya in *Katakiuchi Nori-ai Banashi*, produced at the *Kiriza Theatre* in May 1794.

This double portrait shows two minor actors in minor parts, yet it yielded one of Sharaku's most successful designs. The artist was excited by the contrast of these two faces, by snub-nose and beak-nose, by piercing round eyes and lazy slit-eyes, by the lift and droop of eyebrows. Every inch of this composition carries forward this opposition of lazy vulgarity and incisive, sophisticated scheming. Again note the use of crests on the costumes as a key to the identification of the actor and his role.

Plate 8. *Segawa Tomisaburo II* as *Yadorigi* (right) and *Nakamura Mansei* as the servant *Wakakusa* in *Hana Ayame Bunroku Soga*, same production as Plate 1.

Again Sharaku was fascinated by the contrast of the nervous elongated face of the mistress and the round placid face of the servant. With costume and coiffure so rigidly prescribed and stylized, there would seem little room for expressiveness; yet note but the drooping downward movement in the head-dress of the maid and jerky angular effect produced by the same fashion when worn by the other woman, then these lines repeated and emphasized by the hands that droop down or point upward.

Plate 9. *Ichikawa Komazo II* as *Shiga Dai-shichi*, same production as Plate. 7.

Despite inscriptions, crests, and other clues, there still remains some room for error in identifying Sharaku's actor portraits. The present one was commonly designated as the role of *Sadakuro* in *Chushingura*.

This is one of Sharaku's simplest designs, almost entirely in black-and-white, except for the small areas of color in the kimono and sword, and a touch

of red near the eyes. With these economic means the portrait yet emerges as a clear revelation of villainy. This characterization is carried out not only through the beak nose, the grim lips, and the shifty, beady eyes, but is echoed through the stormy color, the violent angularity of the hairline, and the hand that clutches the sword. The whole composition is jumpy, jerky, and threatening.

Plate 10. The stage manager of the *Miyako* Theatre about to read an announcement to the audience before the play *Keisei Sanbon Karakasa* during the production of that play in July 1794.

On the back of the print Sharaku wrote, "I am going to show you my new series of actor prints," thus indicating the opening phase of what is often called the *second period* in his work. The shift is not so much one of chronology—since his entire output occupied less than a year—as a change to full-length figure portrayal.

The characterization of this all-important theatrical boss is revealed partly through the face and largely through the heavy squatting pose of the pompous old man. The mass of the figure counts far more than the inner details, for Sharaku reduces the busy pattern of the kimono to a flat area, without making the fabric follow the bend at each fold. He thus achieves a flat textured red, to play against the dull green, while the whole mountainous mass is silhouetted against the white mica ground.

The blank area of the curved paper scroll is a veritable *tour de force* in leading the attention upward to the wrinkled face.

Plate 11. *Otani Oniji II* as *Kawashima Jirogoro* in *Nihon Matsu Mutsu no Oitachi* at the *Kawarazaki* Theatre, July 1794.

In this format of *hoso-ban* or narrow rectangle Sharaku placed a most economical and forceful design of a wicked character in a murder scene. A foreboding of evil deeds increases as the eye rises from the white under-statement in the lower half to the mounting excitement of red-black-and-white, and culminates in the grasping hand ready to pull the sword, while the snake-like head juts forward. All lines rush about in a whirlpool of interlocking curves and angles.

Plate 12. *Segawa Tomisaburo II* as *Keisei Toyama*, and *Ichikawa Kurizo* as *Higashiyama-Yoshiwaka-maru* in *Keisei Sanbon Karakasa*, same production as Plate 10.

In this S-shaped design, silhouetted against a yellow ground, Sharaku seizes that high moment called *mie* at the climax of a scene, when the actor sums up an action in a single prolonged pose. Here the woman hides the child behind her flowing robe and the painter heightens the concealing gesture through a legerdemain of color and line. By fusing the color and pattern of the child's clothing with that of the woman's kimono lining, and by extending the black of the *obi* across the child's head, the smaller figure is literally absorbed or hidden by the woman. For the same actor in another role see Plate 8 and note the same crest on the sleeves.

Plate 13. *Ichikawa Komazo II* (at right) as *Chubei* and *Nakayama Tomisaburo* (at left) as *Umekawa* in *Yomo-no Nishiki Furusato-notabiji*, by Chikamatsu Monzaemon; produced at the *Kiriza* Theatre in August 1794.

Two lovers are here moving toward an elopement and double suicide. Sharaku weaves them together in a continuous color scheme of tan, rose, and black, and silhouettes them as one single mass against the

dark mica ground. Subtlety of mood and foreboding might seem beyond the power of expression through simplified line and pattern in a woodcut; yet Sharaku hints even at such tenuous ideas through the man's concern and the woman's sleepwalking and drifting movement.

Plate 14. *Ichikawa Yazo III* as *Fuwa Banzamon* and *Sakata Hangoro* as *Kannonbo* in *Keisei Sanbon-Karakasa*, same production as Plates 10, 12 and 15.

In a composition that makes the most forceful use of a limited space, Sharaku poses two persons in that climactic moment of *Kabuki* called *mie*. The painter not only had to crowd a maximum of external dramatic action into a single instant, but he solved in a masterful fashion the revelation of psychological forces that contrasted the two roles. Over the cringing, decadent nobleman, in his over-decorated costume (*hade*), towers the personification of manly self-reliance in an austere robe of gray and white (*shibui*). A white mica background is the neutral area against which this battle of characters, of theatrical devices, and of sheer painterly means is resolved in a single soaring mass.

This force of design and this subtlety of character insight was entirely beyond the call of duty, since neither the actors, the stage managers, nor the public of Sharaku's day were prepared to appreciate such artistry. There was no precedent and there could be no later echo of this incisive characterization of *Kabuki* actors. Only Shunsho might approach this art at a considerable distance; the actors of Shunyei and Shunko appear like weak puppets in comparison.

Plate 15. *Sawamura Sojuro III* as *Nagoya Sanza* and *Segawa Kikunojo* as *Keisei Katsuragi* in the same production as Plates 10, 12 and 14.

The rich brocades and rainbow hues of *Kabuki* costume are theatrically most effective when they animate the wide stage of a large theatre. It is quite another matter to crowd such violent colors and busy patterns into the small confines of a woodcut print. All the great *Ukiyo-e* artists were confronted with this problem and each solved it in his own way.

In this print Sharaku resorts to a masterly device of composition when he places the man's patterned kimono as a vertical column at the left and then anchors these myriad details by the heavy, solid mass in the lower center. Then he also unifies excessive multiplicity by a simple triangular mass that cuts the picture almost exactly in half. An additional binder and unifier is the tone of rose that flows like a sparkling river, appearing and disappearing behind the massive blocks from upper left to lower right.

With these same devices Sharaku also emphasizes the psychological tension between the weak young man who would dominate and the forceful woman who must yield.

Plate 16. *Segawa Kikunojo III* as *Nakai Ohama* in *Hana no Miyako Kuruwa no Nawabari*, produced at the *Miyako Theatre* in November 1794.

One of ten large portraits that Sharaku made during the autumn *Kabuki* season in 1794, reveals a decline of his artistry during the "middle period" in his short career.

This print calls for a comparison with Plate 1, a portrait of the same actor made about half a year before. The earlier design seems naively simple in pose and quietly harmonious coloring; in the later print Sharaku strains for effect through the jerky *contraposto* of the head and the jumpy color areas of complementary clashes in green and red and the equally jumpy and opposing movements of black.

Plates 17 and 18. *Sumo Wrestlers*

These two prints flank a central single figure of the famous *Daidozan* (not shown here), to make a triptych of the most renowned heroes of the ring. Such pictures of the athletic idols of the day were extremely popular during the heyday of *Sumo* wrestling in the *Kansei* Era (1789-1800).

The grouping of five fleshy athletes in a mass of humanity did not offer Sharaku the dramatic and pictorial richness of *Kabuki*, but he absolved himself better than in most of these set pieces required by popular demand. Very likely he did not object or take offense at this subject which seems almost an artistic impossibility for Western taste.

Actually Sharaku proceeded quite simply, without exaggeration and without any intention of caricature. The five wrestlers in each group have been identified by name and are rendered with individuality and characterization of face and posture.

Plate 19. *Otani Tokuji* as *Yakko Sodesuke* in *Hana Ayame Bunroku Soga*, the same production as Plates 1 and 8.

Plate 20. *Arashi Tatsuzo* as *Kanekashi Ishibe Kinkichi* in *Hana Ayame Bunroku Soga*, same production as Plates 1, 8 and 19.

Plate 21. *Sakata Hangoro III* as *Fujikawa Mizuemon* in *Hana Ayame Bunroku Soga*, same production as Plates 1, 8, 19 and 20.

This sequence of three actors from the same play will serve as a demonstration of the concentration that Sharaku devoted to a single production on the *Kabuki* stage. He observed and projected himself into every role, of male and female parts, of comedians and villains and tragic heroes, in order to distil from each characterization some essence for a portrait that is almost a diagrammatic externalization

of a personality. He seized avidly every personal difference in outline of cheek, in curve of mouth, and in tilt of eyebrow, not in order to mock in the manner of a caricaturist, but in order to extract the maximum of pictorial and dramatic variety for his design.

Plate 22. *Matsumoto Koshiro IV* as *Sakanaya Gorobe* in *Kataki-uchi Nori-ai Banashi*, same production as Plates 7 and 9.

A relaxed moment in the enacting of a forceful character by a strong actor. The emphatic black line of the collar makes a bridge from the hands peacefully engaged in smoking and the keen absorption of the face, whose intensity of thought has only been heightened by physical release through tobacco.

Plate 23. *Nakayama Tomisaburo* as *Miyagino* in *Kataki-uchi* etc., same production as Plates 7, 9 and 22.; same actor appears in Plate. 13.

Among Sharaku's portraits of *onnagata* or female impersonators this design holds a high place, both pictorially and psychologically. In the large head the essential masculinity of the actor is contrasted with the effeminate gesture of a small hand. Realism and romantic stylization are somehow reconciled by echo and interplay of sharp, aggressive angles in the coiffure and the undulating curve of the costume.

Plates 24 and 25. Eyes in Sharaku's portraits.

The stylized make-up of the *Kabuki* actors aims at a heightened theatricality to carry across a wide stage and a large hall. The eyes do not play as important a part as the larger units of physiognomy, mouth and eyebrows, which have greater visibility; and, of course, the actor depends most urgently on the expressiveness of his whole body, on action, pose, and costume.

Sharaku's interest in eyes is, therefore, his special

aberration from the practice of actors and their portraitists in *Ukiyo-e*. In examining any single print this preoccupation is not very apparent and the eyes take their place as a minor note in the whole design. In these two plates attention is directed to the amazing variety and crystallization of character that Sharaku injected into those small, beady eyes and their encircling brows. Each of these details may serve as a veritable keynote to personality and design, which the artist then expands by the repetitions, variations, and larger chords of his musical structure.

Plate 26. *Bando Hikosaburo III* as *Obiya Choemon* and *Iwai Hanshiro IV* as *Shinanoya Ohan* in *Katsuragawa Tsuki-no-Omoide* at the *Kawarazaki Theatre*, July 1794.

In respect to design, this print may lack some of the sharpness and compact quality of several other two-figure actor portraits by Sharaku. It is here included primarily as an example of the traveling scenes called *michiyuki*. In this particular scene, involving an elopement of two lovers, the man hesitates, fearful of inflicting hardship or tragedy on his fragile partner, while the woman rises to a reckless bravado in the conviction that "all's for love and the world well lost."

Here the man stands stiff and withdrawn, but the woman is actively reciting and gesturing. Stripes and noisy pattern on the kimono contribute to the restlessness of this scene.

Plate 27. *Matsumoto Koshiro IV* as *Magoemon* and *Nakayama Tomisaburo* as *Umekawa*, in the same production as Plate 13.

It would be difficult to find anywhere, in any art, and even in any technique more realistic than that of the woodcut, so human and dramatic a scene as this print by Sharaku. Here a woman pleads with the

father of her lover, who has come to separate them.

One wonders whether the *onnagata* on the stage could have shown this interaction of wills and temperaments as subtly as Sharaku does here through the tautness of bow-like curve in the man's pose and the submissive counter-curve of the kneeling woman. And yet the painter does not cajole our sympathies by prettifying the girl, whom he clearly depicts as a man in the role of a woman. In this degree of his penetration into character, Sharaku the actor precedes Sharaku the painter.

Plate 28. *Ichikawa Omezo* as *Sekitori Ikazuchi Tsurunosuke* and *Otani Oniji II* as *Ukiyo Dohei*, in the same production as Plate 11; the same actors also appear in Plates 3 and 4.

In this *tour de force* of composition of two men with four swords Sharaku out-*Kabukis Kabuki*, for he takes over one of the typical *mie* poses of the kneeling swashbuckler and adds the daring back view of the standing figure in *contraposto*.

The same actors who impersonated good and evil, a sort of Cassio and Iago on Plates 3 and 4, are here carrying on their respective specialities. Sharaku unswervingly captures the actors' personal appearance as well as their interpretation of a part. If this is not a super-realism above the common usage of that word, then reality has no equivalent either in language or in pictorial design.

Plate 29. *Arashi Tatsuzo* as *Ukiyo Matabei* and *Otani Hiroji III* as *Tosa Matabei* in the same production as Plates 10, 12, 14 and 15.

In order to emphasize their bristling aggressiveness, Sharaku here elongates his actors as in an exaggerated perspective looking up from below. This is by no means an eccentric angle of vision, for it becomes an organic part of *Kabuki* whenever an actor

stops for a *mie* pose on the long *hanamichi* approach, where the audience is seated below, looking up.

Stance, gesture, pattern of costume and the scattered spotting of black areas all contribute to the excitement beneath a momentary lull.

Plate 30. *Sawamura Sojuro III* and *Kataoka Nizaemon VII* in *Neya-ne-shi Meika-no-*

Hommare, produced at the *Miyakoza* Theatre, November 1794.

In this diptych Sharaku has added an ineffectual landscape background, a new venture for him and certainly an unfortunate one. If this print is representative of his later phase, then Sharaku was indeed declining rapidly in his artistry before his sudden final disappearance.

VIII Glossary

aragoto (literally *rough action*). The melodramatic and most externalized activity in the *Kabuki* plays, filled with shouting, rushing, and hand-to-hand fighting.

bijin or beautiful women; an especially popular branch of Japanese painting and prints, in which close-ups were shown of pretty ladies in lovely kimonos.

bunjinga paintings by men of letters or scholars. A Sino-Japanese painting style practiced by non-professional artists and thus allowing more freedom and eccentricity than the academies would permit.

daimyo the great feudal landholders, warlords, and art patrons, whose status in the social pyramid was directly beneath that of the aristocrats allied by blood with the Imperial family. The *daimyo* were the actual administrators of the land, while the royal court was a social body and the *shogunate* a political organization.

Edo (sometimes also spelled Yedo), the present day city of Tokyo, was founded as a fortified castle in the fifteenth century, but began its phenomenal development when the Tokugawa *shogun* selected it for a capital city in 1615 A.D.

Edokko a person born in Edo; usually a brash, know-all, cockney type of city urchin.

genre a term taken over from the French, and not too well suited to the school of painting that deals with the life of the common people in Japan.

geisha (literally a skilled or artistic person) designates a class of feminine entertainer that developed for the more refined relaxation of Japanese men, somewhat as the *heterae* entertained the Greeks. The long period of training in the grace of social intercourse also raised the *geisha* to the status of a refined French actress, perhaps lax in her sexual *mores*, but by no means to be designated

as a prostitute.

hade showy or flowery, in contradistinction to restrained or quietly refined taste.

hanamichi (literally the *flower walk*) a long runway leading from the *Kabuki* stage through the auditorium, and back to a special entrance. On this platform are enacted the most dramatic moments, when the actor sums up an action in a pose or a movement of concentrated mimetic power.

hoso-ban the elongated rectangular format of standard print papers, between the larger pages and the still narrower "pillar prints."

Joruri a musical narrative chanted as accompaniment in the *Kabuki* drama and in the *Bunraku* or puppet plays.

Kabuki (literally "song, dance, and skill") a form of drama which depends heavily on vigorous acting, stylized dancing, musical accompaniment, and brilliant costume for its theatrical appeal and wide popularity.

kimono (literally clothing) a long garment of simple cut worn by both men and women in Japan. Despite its rectangular cut, women know how to make this costume cling to the figure and let it become a very ornamental adornment, far from the easy, homelike garment of its European incarnation.

mie a dramatic pose for "show"; a pose or tableau enacted on the *hanamichi*, usually as a climax after a very dramatic action.

mon family crest, painted or embroidered on a Japanese kimono. Usually such crests are

placed on the sleeves, on the breast, and in the center back, between the shoulders.

nishiki-e (literally "brocade picture") the fully developed polychrome wood prints, as used by Harunobu and later, or after the year 1770 A.D.

Noh a form of drama developed in the fifteenth century, from still older religious forms. Its poetic chanting, use of masks, and elaborate symbolism precluded its spread as a popular art, but to this day it retains its hold as one of the noble and most polished arts of old Japan.

obi a long and wide sash worn by women to hold the kimono in place. It is wrapped around the chest, secured by ribbon ties, and ends in a wide loop in the back. The obi constitutes the most decorative part of a Japanese woman's dress.

A much narrower and far less elaborate obi is worn by men.

oiran the leading courtesan or the great beauty of the Yoshiwara.

onnagata a male actor specializing in feminine roles on the *Kabuki* stage. This does not imply the suppression of masculine qualities and is not at all comparable to "female impersonators" in the Western hemisphere.

samisen a stringed instrument of fairly recent importation to Japan, probably in the seventeenth century, via the Ryukyu islands. It has become an essential accompaniment for *Kabuki* and for the Japanese dance.

samurai a feudal warrior of officer status, since he carried two swords and commanded the common infantry under him.

shibui (literally "astringent") a descriptive term of subtle meaning, implying an aesthetic of ascetic simplicity. Used as antonym for *hade*.

shogun the military governor or dictator, and virtual ruler of the country, while the emperor remained its symbolic and religious head. This rank attained special prominence in the thirteenth, the fifteenth, and the seventeenth centuries. The last period applies to the

Tokugawa *shoguns* who ruled Japan from their capital in Edo; between 1615 and 1867 A.D.

ukiyo literally the "floating world" or the world of ephemeral appearance. A Buddhist term that later came to mean the loosely gathered world of entertainers and restaurant owners or brothel keepers in Edo.

Ukiyo-e paintings or woodcut prints dealing with the amusements and the entertainers of Edo.

za (literally seat) a term still used for the establishment of a theatre or other large institution.

IX Bibliography

A. In Japanese

- Nakata, Katsunosuke: *Sharaku Ars*, Tokyo 1925.
 Yoshida, Teruji: *Sharaku, Tokyokuni Taihokaku*, Tokyo 1931.
 Yone, Noguchi: *Sharaku Seibundo-Shinkosha*, Tokyo 1931.
 Inoue, Kazuo: *Sharaku Takamizawa-Mokuhansha*, Tokyo 1932.
 Yoshida, Teruji: *Sharaku Hokko Shobo*, Tokyo 1943.
 Fukumoto, Kazuo: *Hokusai & Sharaku Hidaka Shobo*, Tokyo 1949.
 Yoshida, Teruji: *Ukiyo-e Jiten*, Vol. 1. Hokko Shobo, Tokyo 1944.
 Fujikake, Shizuya: *Ukiyo-e no Kenkyu Yuzankaku*, Tokyo 1943.
 Iwanami, ed: *Sharaku Iwanami Shoten*, Tokyo 1953.
 Kondo, Ichitaro: *Sharaku Kodansha*, Tokyo 1955.
 Yoshida, Teruji: *Sharaku Bijutsu Shuppansha*, Tokyo, 1957.

B. In other Languages

- Adachi, Toyohisa, ed: *Sharaku Facsimile reproductions Meiji Shobo*, Tokyo 1952.
 Binyon, Laurence and Sexton, J.J.O'Brien: *Japanese Color Prints* London, Ernest Benn Ltd., 1923.
 Ficke, Arthur Davison: *Chats on Japanese Prints* London, Fisher Unwin. 1915. New edition by Chas. E. Tuttle Co., Tokyo and Rutland 1958.
 Henderson, Harold G. and Ledoux, Louis V. *The Surviving Works of Sharaku* New York, Weyhe 1937.
 Hillier, J. *Japanese Masters of the Color Print*. London, Phaidon 1954.

- Kondo, Ichitaro and Blum, Paul C: *Sharaku* (Vol. II. of Kodansha Library of Japanese Art) Chas. E. Tuttle Co., Tokyo and Rutland 1955.
 Kurth, Julius: *Sharaku* Munich, R. Piper & Co., 1922.
 Ledoux, Louis V: *Japanese Prints of the Ledoux Collection*: Vol. I-V. New York, Weyhe 1942-1951.
 Michener, James. *The Floating World* New York, Random House 1954.
 Rumpf, Fritz: *Meister des Japanischen Holzschnittes* Berlin 1924.
 Volker, T: *Ukiyo-e Quartet*; Publisher, Designer Engraver, and Printer Leiden, J.Brill 1949.

C. General Background

- Sansom, Sir George B: *Japan, a Short Cultural History* rev. ed. New York, Appleton-Century Co. 1943.
The Western World and Japan; A Study in the Interaction of European and Asiatic Cultures. New York, Alfred A. Knopf 1950.
 Honjo, Eijiro: *Economic Theory and History of Japan in the Tokugawa Period* Tokyo, Maruzen 1943.

D. Japanese Theatre

- Bowers, Faubion: *Japanese Theatre* New York, Hermitage House 1952.
 Ernst, Earle: *The Kabuki Theatre*. New York, Oxford Univ. Press 1956.
 Haar, Francis: *Japanese Theatre in Highlight; A Pictorial Commentary*. Tuttle, Tokyo 1952.
 Iacovleff, Alexander and Elisseeff, Sergei: *Le Théâtre Japonais (Kabuki)* Paris, Meynial 1933.
 Tatekawa, Emba: *Kabuki Nendai Ki*. (Chronological Records of Kabuki Plays) Tokyo 1905.

菊之丞

寛政六年甲寅秋九月

東洲齋萬葉画隱













um, Luck







UP State Museum, Lucknow













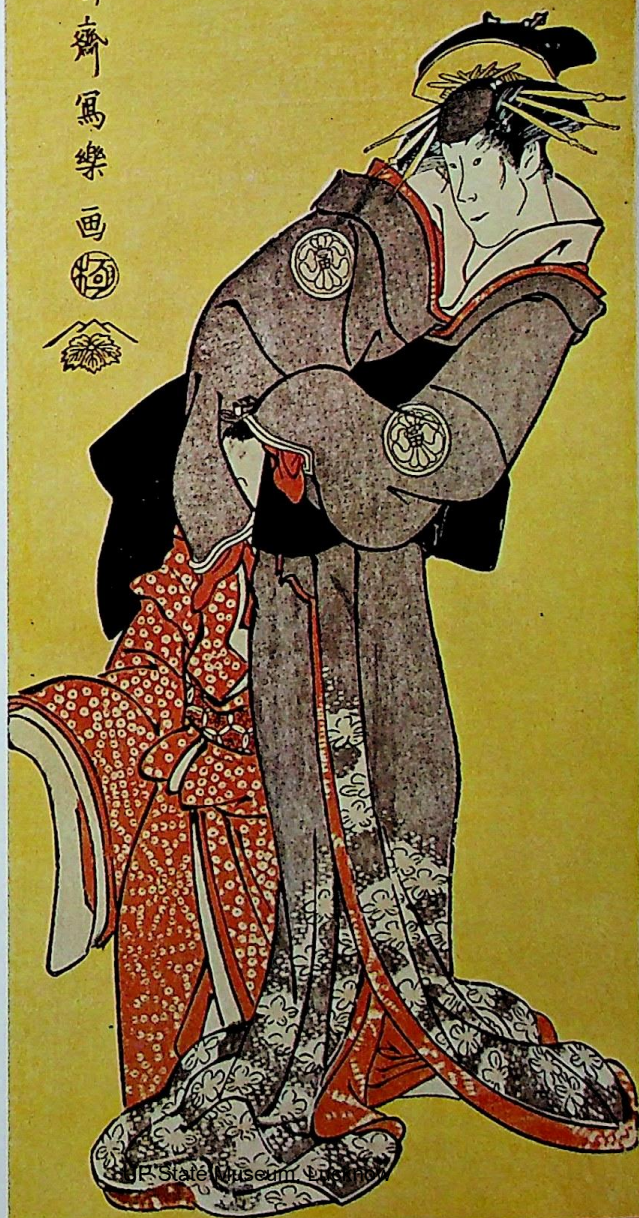
東洲齋寫華圖

東洲齊寫樂画





東洲齊寫樂画











演村屋路寿

寫樂画















UP State Museum, Lucknow



UP State Museum, Lucknow

gotri







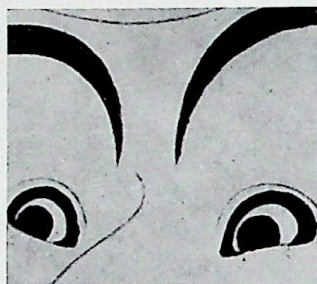
Details from Sharaku's Prints



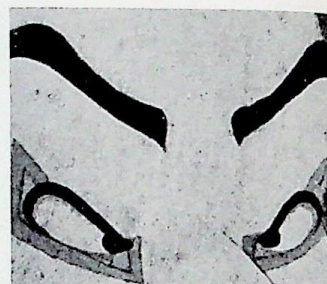
see pl. 4



see pl. 20



see pl. 2



see pl. 3

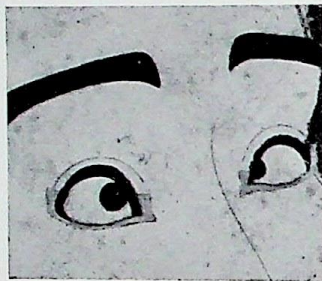
The eye of Kabuki actors playing female roles.



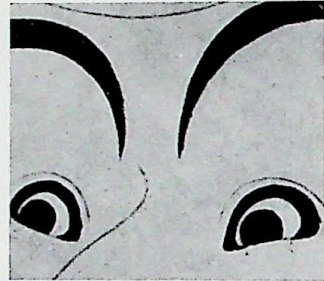
Details from Sharaku's Prints



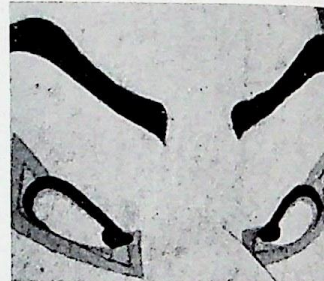
see pl. 4



see pl. 20



see pl. 2



see pl. 3

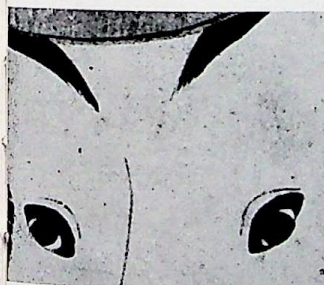


see pl. 9



The eye of Kabuki actors playing male roles.

The eye of Kabuki actors playing female roles.



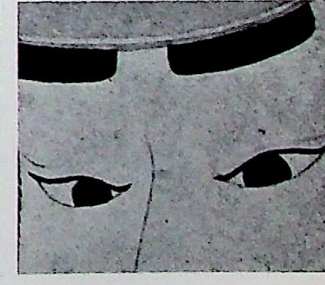
see pl. 5



see p. 2

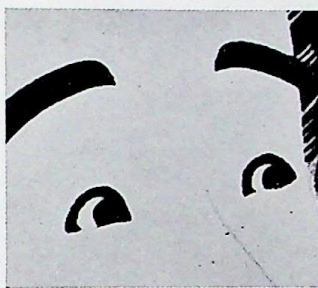


see pl. 16

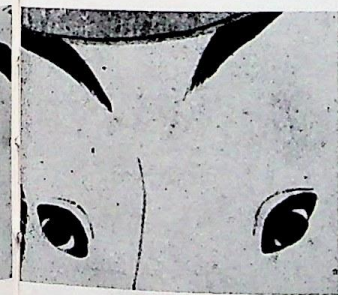




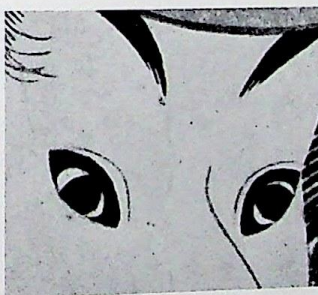
see pl. 9



The eye of Kabuki actors playing male roles.



see pl. 5



see p. 2



see pl. 16





東洲齋寫樂西極





東洲齋寫樂

西

遊

山

東洲齋寫樂画





IN THIS SERIES

Persian Art

Early Indian Art

Tong-ko and Westernmost China

Ancient China

Japanese Religious Art

Yamato-e School of Painting

Japanese Picture Scrolls*

Chinese Ink Painting

Wall Painting

Chinese-style Landscape Art

Ukiyo-e

Pottery

Handicrafts

Sotatsu

Korin

Utamaro

Hokusai

Hiroshige*

Sharaku*

Sesshu

Taiga

Okyo

The volumes marked *
have already appeared.

MASTERPIECES OF THE JAPANESE COLOUR WOODCUT

Willy Boller

The Japanese woodcut first became known in Europe at the time when the great French Impressionists flourished. Its discovery was a revelation of beauty. Since then the grace, humour and spiritual nobility of this oriental art-form have been a source of inspiration to western artists, designers and painters as well as a wonderland of beauty for the connoisseur.

The present volume embraces almost 200 masterpieces in this genre, spanning the three and a half centuries from the early seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century. All the reproductions are taken from the originals in the author's collection. Thus the total effect is of an overpowering harmony derived from the impact of an altogether individual taste and selection. To each reproduction the author has contributed a comprehensive explanatory note on the artist's career, background and particular achievement.

Nothing could better render the spirit and achievement of the Japanese colour woodcut than this extract from a book written by one of its greatest masters, Hokusai, at the age of seventy-five: "From my sixth year I drew every possible object. By the time I was fifty I had published an unending series of drawings but nothing that I did before I reached the age of seventy is of any moment. At the age of seventy-three I began to grasp nature, the animals, grasses, trees, birds, fishes and insects. At the age of eighty I shall have made further progress and at ninety I shall penetrate the secret of things." This remarkable statement is a testimony to the imperishable tradition of the Japanese colour woodcut, and this volume devoted to it is an outstanding achievement in presentation and printing.

16 Colour and 88 Monochrome illustrations

Demy Folio

8 Guineas net

ELEK BOOKS 14 GREAT JAMES STREET LONDON W. C. 1.

UP State Museum, Lucknow